Indonesian Journal of Arabic Studies, Vol. 4 Issue 2, November 2022
Avaliable online at http://www.syekhnurjati.ac.id/jurnal/index.php/ijas/index
DOI : **10.24235/ijas.v4i2.10321**
Published by Departement of Arabic Language and Literature, Faculty of Adab
IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Indonesia

Arabic Culture and Disagreements in Political TV Conversation

الثقافة العربية والاختلافات في التفاعلات السياسية المتلفزة

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• ***Received:*** *25.04.2022* • ***Accepted:*** *10.10.2022* • ***Published online***: *24.11.2022*

Abstract: *In intercultural studies, Arabic society has been described as high-context culture that rely more on indirect message and little room is provided within verbalized articulations. This study attempts to prove out this basic insight relating to communication pattern of a culture in other settings, by analyzing Arabic disagreements in TV interaction. Little investigation about disagreements have been done in Arabic context. The current study will fill this gap and seeks to explore the realization of speech act of disagreement within the context of televised political discourse by analyzing and comparing direct and mitigated disagreement strategies in Arabic political TV talks. In order to achieve these research objectives, a total of twelve Arabic recorded TV programs were transcribed and analyzed through qualitative and quantitative methods. Disagreement responses in the corpus were classified and adjusted based on application framework suggested by some previous studies. The procedures for conducting this study involve data collection, transcription and analysis, using Conversation Analysis (CA) technique. This study reveales that the general percentage of direct disagreements were obviously higher and preferred to that of alleviated disagreements (64.9%-35.0%) which challenges the generalizations about cultural distinctions. Arabic disagreement features such as negation particle, explicit oppositional phrases and disagreement with apology were identified. When the Arab interactants engage in conflict, employing vocative particle with calling the name of the other speaker is one of the unique features found in this research. For future studies, researchers should be mindful of integrating polite and conflict framework for more comprehensive interpretation of human communication.*

Keywords: *Arabic culture, direct and mitigated disagreements, politic, TV discourse.*

الملخص : وُصفَت الثقافة العربية في الأدبيات الثقافية على أنها ثقافة ذات سياق عالٍ تعتمد على توصيل الرسالة بطريقة ضمنية وتتميز بقلة لجوئها إلى تعبيرات لفظية مباشرة. وتسعى هذه الدراسة إلى إثبات المفهوم المعمَّم ذي الصلة بأنماط التواصل لثقافة معينة في سياق آخر، وذلك بتحليل أشكال الاختلافات في التفاعلات العربية المتلفزة. لم تحظ الدراسات حول الاختلافات في السياق العربي بالقدر الوافي من الاهتمام. وجاءت هذه الورقة سدًّا لهذه الثغرة، محاولةً الكشف عن توظيف فعل الكلام "الاختلاف" في الخطاب التلفازي السياسي، وعلى وجه التحديد تهدف إلى تحليل ومقارنة استراتيجيات الاختلاف

المباشرة والمخففة في الحوارات السياسية العربية المتلفزة. ووصولًا إلى هذه الأهداف، دُونَّت وحُلِّلت اثنتا عشرة حلقة مسجلة من البرامج الحوارية المتلفزة بالاعتماد على المنهجين الكيفي والإحصائي. لقد تم التصنيف والتعديل لاستجابات الاختلاف في البيانات بناءً على الأطر التطبيقية المقترحة في بعض الدراسات السابقة. وتتضمن الطرق لإجراء هذه الدراسة جمع البيانات وتدوينها وتحليلها باستخدام منهج تحليل المحادثة. ويكشف هذا البحث عن أن النسبة المئوية للاختلافات الصريحة أعلى بوضوح، ومفضَّلة من الاختلافات المخففة بنسبة (64.9%-35.0%)، ولذا، خالفت هذه الدراسة التعميمات الصادرة من بعض الدراسات الثقافية. كما توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى مجموعة من النتائج لمظاهر الاختلافات العربية، أهمها: ورود أدوات النفي، والتراكيب الصريحة للاختلاف، والاختلافات المقترنة بالاعتذار. وعندما ينحرظ المتفاعلون العرب في السياق التصارعي، فإن استعمال حرف النداء مع ذكر اسم المتحدث الآخر من إحدى الخصائص الفريدة الموجودة في هذا البحث. وبالنسبة للدراسات المستقبلية، يجب على الباحثين أن يضعوا في اعتبارهم ضرورة الدمج بين بعدَيْ التأدب والصراع؛ وذلك للوصول إلى التفسير الأكثر شمولًا للتفاعل البشري.

كلمات دلالية: الثقافة العربية، الاختلافات المباشرة والمخففة، السياسة، الخطاب التلفازي

1. Introduction

The detailed study of disagreement speech act in spoken Arabic is largely in its infancy. We will fill this gap in the existing literature, by addressing the degree of direct and mitigated disagreement responses in Arabic TV interaction, taking into account the influence of linguistic, cultural elements and stereotypes about Arabic communication style in the intercultural literature. Western views on Arabic conversation pattern tend to classify it as the language that relies on implicit responses. Native speakers of Arabic are considered as a collectivistic society and their interaction are hyperbolic, spoken implicitly and metaphysical instead of overt utterances (Ayish, 2003; Dodd, 1992; Hall, 1981; Hofstede, 2010). Some studies classified Arabic language and culture within ambiguous interaction (Levine, 1985). Several studies revealed different results regarding this issue. Katriel (1986) and Merkin (2012) argued that Arabs tend to interact with indirect communication. Wang et al. (2011: 3094) carried out a quantitative study on Arabic TV and radio conversation and found that disagreement responses were less than agreement responses (178-524 which equals 25.3%-74.6%) which supports - to some extent - the Arabs' preference for indirect interaction. Nevertheless, other researches revealed that all the strategies and percentages related to the pattern of rejection or disagreement between Arabs and Americans were similar (Nelson et al., 2002). Other studies highlighted direct and aggressive disagreement as a preferred activity employed by Arabic interlocutors (Migdadi et al., 2013) and concluded that directness and

aggravation in Arabic communication were expressed normally in TV settings (Al-Dilaimy and Khalaf, 2014).

The study of the extent to which a particular society tends to utilize direct and indirect language can be realized through the way of managing disagreement whether a particular culture is more inclined to disagree directly or uses certain strategies to lessen the level of conflict. This study attempts to investigate the direct and mitigated disagreement strategies used in Arabic TV talks. Specific description and statistical analysis will be presented in detail with the aim of confirming or rejecting generalizations about conversational style of Arabic language so that we can see a real Arabic interlocutors' preference for directness and indirectness in Arabic TV discussions and how far the linguistic and cultural characteristics have an impact on their expressions of disagreement specifically in international political discussions. The similarities and differences between related previous studies and the current one will be explained in results section.

There is the need to focus on specific strategies of Arabic disagreement. To the researcher's knowledge, there is no single research that compared direct and mitigated disagreement strategies and conducted a statistical comparison between these two conflicting actions. It is hoped that the result of this research will clarify the validity of Western cultural views towards characteristics of Arabic culture that are promoted as the culture of indirectness and ambiguity in term of communication style. Before moving to the data and discussion sections, several important subthemes will be touched in the following pages including: speech act of disagreement, Arabic language-culture features and contemporary perspectives on dimensions of culture.

Speech act of disagreement

Austin (1962) divided speech acts into three levels: (1) locutionary act, (2) illocutionary act, and (3) perlocutionary act. Based on illocutionary acts, he proposed these classes of verbs: verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behavities and exposities. The speech act of disagreement is not listed under any category, although closely related to verbs like argue, deny and object, but he states that: "agreeing, disagreeing, maintaning and defending from another group of illocutions which seem to be both expositive and commissive" (1962: 157). Austin's concept of speech acts was expanded by Searle (1969) and he proposed five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. In Searle's classification, disagreement belongs to the category of representatives or assertives in which speakers commit to the truth (of falsity) of the expressed proposition.

The term disagreement has been defined diversely in the literature including contradiction, criticism, argument and dispute, but we have selected

the term 'disagreement' to be used throughout this paper. Kakava (2002: 1538) considered disagreement briefly as: "The negation of a stated or implied proposition". Although disagreement is seen as dispreferred and distructive reaction by previous researchers, other studies in the same area have argued that disagreement may not necessarily result in damaging the interlocutors relation. Disagreement may indicate the addressee's interest in human interaction rather than indifference through a straightforward agreement or even silence (Sifianou, 2012), and is also face-saving acts as a response to self-deprecating remarks (Pomerantz, 1984).

Along these lines, it appears that speech act of disagreement is extremely complicated and avoids it being simply labelled FTA or impolite act. Disagreement or its counterpart, agreement, may not merely be regarded as preferred or dispreferred responses. The current paper at hand will be examining types of disagreement strategies among Arabic interlocutors in their TV conversation. Two main contexts are chosen for this study, to be specific, the effect of political topic and cultural aspects in Arabic expressions of disagreement. Since the basic generalization in CA argues the inclination of contiguity over dispute, along with the claim that Arabic culture has been classified as high-context culture that relies more on implicit message, the statistical proportion of direct and indirect disagreements will be discussed in order to support or reject previous generalizations concerning Arabic style of communication in a different setting. Before proceeding to analytical section, it is worth to highlight the features of Arabic language and culture, as well as dimensions of culture as described by the modern Western literature.

Characteristics of Arabic culture and language

It is necessary to note here that discussion about culture is a very vast area to be covered. We have selected some themes that somehow related directly to our topic. To achieve a better understanding of groups of people and their culture, it is beneficial to begin by identifying their most fundemental values and beliefs (Nydell, 2014). Culture covers wide elements in human life, involving belief, morals and knowledge. Religion, social background, politeness and linguistic aspects are also in line with cultural elements.

Religious side: Arabic worldview derives from religious Islamic values and attitudes as embodied in the Holy Quran as the primary source of Islamic legislation, along with Prophet Muhammad's sayings and practices that constitute the second source, works of Islamic jurisprudence, literature and philosophy (Ayish, 2003). Arabs and Muslims depend on them in their intellectual, scientific, civilizational and moral renaissance (Al-Tuwayjrī, 2015). Religious affiliation is very vital for every person in Arabic culture. Arab place great value on piety and they respect anyone who sincerely practices his or her

religion (Nydel, 2014). Almost all elements of Arabic culture and life were subsumed under important Islamic values, such as *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God), *īmān* (belief), *'ibādah* (Worship) and *'ilm* (knowledge). In *'ibādah,* classical Arabic language, which is the language of the Holy Quran, is central to Islamic faith and used in daily prayers and supplications (Ayish, 2003).

Social side: Values in Arab society are derived from living patterns, natural environment, class status, family and public order prevailing in contemporary Arab society (Al-Nūri, 2011; Barakāt, 2009). Perhaps one of the accepted axioms in anthropology and in most social sciences is that the natural environment plays a role in creating the first human environment and determining his personality and lifestyle, and is not absent from the Arab community in this regard (Al-Nūri, 2011). Due to the impact of the natural environment represented by the harsh desert environments in particular, and the social concepts and beliefs that result from it, some Arab social values that differ from other societies have emerged, such as the values of '*aṣabiyyah* and hospitality. The values of '*aṣabiyyah* here are not viewed from a negative angle, but rather mean social solidarity, support for relatives, pride in lineage and honor (Barakāt, 2009). The Arab family directs the individual in proving the values of belonging to the group and membership towards people more than the dependance on things, and trains him in the art of *mu'āsharah*, which is, in fact, training the individual to develop the skill of *musāyarah* which "means literally to walk with the other, accompany him, and fit in with him" (Katriel, 1989).

Politeness and linguistic sides: As the religious aspect is deeply rooted in Arabic society after the advent of Islam, religion, to a large extent, is the source of politeness. A very simple reflection of religious Islamic influence on Arabic politeness is the use of expression which typically contains a reference to God or *Allah*. In this sort of expression, "we see that the idea of politeness constitutes a compromise between the humble way and dignified way" (Samarah, 2012: 2006). "The lexicon of *Allah* is found daily in almost all communication activities of Arabic speaking cultures" (Bouchara, 2016: 29). The Arabic language is basically a rich language in term of vocabulary, structures and modes of expression, and this phenomenon has allowed the emergence of countless different linguistic forms, including indirect and rhetorical forms. Rhetorical communication patterns are related to indirect expression and can be found clearly in Arabic rhetorical literature, such as the concept of *kināyah, majāz, tikrār, ījāz and tashbīh*. *Kināyah*, for example, is a clever strategy of indirect expression and used for many pragmatic purposes, and this strategy is more effective in the case that the hearer's face need to be saved, as direct imposition would lead to more damaging effect (Al-Maydāniy, 1996).

In contemporary views on Arabic conversation style, Arabic language and culture are characterized by repetition, indirectness and elaborateness (Feghali, 1997). Repetition exerts significant linguistic constraints on discoursal inclination and used in greeting, meeting and thanking. The Arabs use it frequently to prove the positive aspect of other speakers. Ayish (2003), after evaluating Western communication theories and proposing a normative Arab-Islamic perspective as a basis for communication theory building in the Arabic-Islamic context, concluded that Arabic interaction patterns are orally biased, indirect, hyperbolic, asymmetrical and metaphysical.

Modern perspectives on dimensions of culture

Literature about relation between culture and language in our present day can be referred to several cultural continuum developed by a number of theories over the years. In order to get a better understanding of the relation of direct and indirect communication with certain cultures, it is worth to highlight some viewpoints from cultural studies researchers. Perhaps the most well-known cultural dimensions are that generated by Hall (1981), Levine (1985), Dodd (1992) and Hofstede (2010). Hall (1981) formed the terms “high context culture” and “low context culture”. Based on his study, society in high context cultures rely on the use of implicit message and the use of the context in their interaction instead of spoken utterances. Meaning or metaphor is embedded more in the context rather than the verbal code. Some of these cultures include: Japan, Arabic, India and China. On the other hand, people in low context culture rely more on the use of explicit utterances. Messages are plainly coded and details are spoken overtly. In other word, very great space is provided within direct verbalized articulation. Low context cultures, according to his observation, include: European, English and American.

In another cultural dimension, Levine (1985) discussed notion of univocality versus ambiguity in communication patterns. American culture is categorized under straighforward interaction, whereas Arabic culture, according to him, is classified within ambiguous interaction. American verbal style features are direct, simplicity valued, objective and emotionalism avoided. Contrarily, Arabic verbal pattern features are ambiguous, circular, subjective and embellishments and emotion valued.

Dodd (1992) suggested the framework “linear” thought versus “non-linear” thought framework. Linearity stresses presentation of singular theme, beginnings and ends of events, and is object oriented rather than people oriented. The American culture is more representative this type of framework. The Arabic culture, in his view, more non-linear. The cultures of non-linear framework involve multiple themes, flexibility of events, and people are more important than time and organization orientation. The Dodd’s frameworks

closely connected to the terms "monochronic" and "polychronic" cultures. Monochronic and polychronic terms also refer to time and task organization as well as low-high communication patterns. In non-linear or polychronic cultures, imagery and vagueness is preferred to accuracy and specificity of terms.

Another prevalent cultural variation term discussed by scholars is "individualism" versus "collectivism". Hofstede (2010), discussed the characteristics of the society from behavioural, sex, communication and language aspects in view of collectivism and individualism. Through his research, seventy-six countries were ranked on a specific scale, starting with the categories of individual cultures and ending with the categories of collective cultures. This scale shows that the United States of America ranks first as the most individual culture, and Arab countries are ranked 41-42 among the countries of the world, and they belong to the least individual and most collective culture. Approximating to what had been mentioned in previous cultural matrix, individualists are more responsive to direct communication, simplicity and accuracy, whereas collectivists are more attuned to vagueness, verbosity and reliance on non-verbal linguistic features. We may assume that collectivist cultures, like Arabic as described by culture scholars, tend to minimize a direct confrontation of another person by preferring covert and paralinguistic cues, rather than direct linguistic behaviour.

The type of conveying message, either direct or indirect in Arabic or other cultures also influenced by situations and constraints. The complexity of disagreement response and the roles of individual traits, topics, situational and cultural tendencies play an important role in exhibiting the preference for disagreement response. This study will see to what extent the direct and indirect disagreement strategies are used in Arabic TV talks, with the intention that cultural observation concerning Arabic indirectness as dominant feature could be verified in other settings.

1. Methods

This part presents the procedures for conducting this study, involving the data collection, transcription and analysis. 12 episodes of Arabic recorded TV programmes, drawn from 4 Arabic TV programmes namely *Al-Niqāsh* (France 24 Arabic), *Ḥiwār Al-'Arab* (Al-Arabiyya), *Nīrān Ṣadīqah* (Skynews Arabic) and *Ḥadīth Al-Sā'ah* (BBC Arabic) were selected. The corpus duration compiled for analysis was approximately 9 hours of conversations and each episode was broadcast around 50 minutes. The TV episodes were touched upon political issues in Middle East countries.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were selected for the data analysis. The first focuses on the description and explanation of direct and

mitigated disagreements. The second concentrates on description and comparison of statistical evidences for both types of disagreement. Due to the scarcity of Arabic studies on disagreement in TV context, several Arabic studies were found and help the current study to develop a research design, data collection and disagreement distribution. These studies present theoretical and practical backgrounds such as kinds of disagreement strategies in Arabic TV talks (Al-Ahmad and Wardat, 2010), aggressiveness techniques in Saudi broadcast interviews (Alfahad, 2015) and the comparison of disagreement strategies in term of political, religious and social aspects (Harb, 2016).

The scientific procedures of the study were distributed according to conversation analysis (CA) method to these specific stages, which are: data collection, listening repeatedly and carefully to all selected excerpts, data transcription and analysis. Transcription is an important aspect in CA and it highlights important features of the interaction like silence and gap between spoken words, interruption during conversation and the length and speed of the voice. To transfer the selected data into written texts, we used a method developed by Jefferson (2004). This transcription method is a conversational analysis code used by academics looking at speech patterns. The transcription symbols are quite complicated and it may lead to difficulty for the reader. Our study does not transcribe all dialogues, but it will focus on the areas that achieve the purposes of the research and use only some important symbols to indicate the interaction movement in general; because the main purpose of this study is to reveal linguistic features of direct and downgraded Arabic disagreements. Symbols for facial expressions like eye or head movements are not taken into consideration.

After transcribing the recordings, the scripts were searched for instances of disagreement. Each token of disagreement, related to our concern, was identified in the corpus, which was then manually indexed according to their functions. Some categories and levels used were based on the functions of disagreement described in previous studies (e.g., Brown and Levinson, 1987; Harb, 2016; Muntigl and Turnbull, 1998; Pomerantz, 1984; Rees-Miller, 2000), such as the classification of disagreement level into downgraded, same level and upgraded disagreements.

This paper briefly mentions some examples for basic response of disagreement, like basic negation "no" or other direct replies such as "I do not agree" and some patterns of direct Arabic disagreement sentences. Other disagreement responses like upgraded sarcasm, contradiction, rhetorical question and irrelevancy claim were excluded. This study focuses only on the analysis of direct and mitigated disagreements.

2. Results and Discussion

The analysis in this current paper is divided into two parts. The first section highlights a specific analysis for selected examples of Arabic direct and mitigated disagreements. It presents the linguistic patterns of disagreement responses among Arabic speakers in their TV talks. They were various types of direct and mitigated disagreements, but the researcher will be selecting some of them to be discussed extensively in this paper. The second section will be presenting statistical distribution of direct and mitigated disagreements, followed by researcher's description, analysis and comparison aspect.

Direct disagreements

Direct or explicit disagreements which are termed in some studies can be defined as any negative statement, uttered by a next speaker that is not accompanied neither by language intensifiers nor language softeners. In other words, it is expressed directly. The most obvious, simple and shortest negative indicator is the *"no"* particle. In this study, this type of negation was employed widely in selected TV conversation. Another basic disagreement response is the phrase: *"I disagree with you"*. After collecting and selecting the data carefully, this study found a lot of language particles, phrases and sentences that indicate the expression of disagreement among arabic TV guests.

The disagreement expressions used by Arab guests in the selected data were various including standard and colloquial Arabic language. In realizing the main objective of this study, the researcher will be focusing on some of them in detail through these following samples:

Excerpt 1 (*Al-Niqāsh*, France24 Arabic, 4/10/2016, T = Tawfīq, S = Ṣāliḥah, Z = Zaynah).

1.	**T**	*Am Anna Al-Ittijāh Huwa 'Askarat Al-Dawlah Wa Khalq qawmiyyah 'Askariyyah Nāṣiriyyah Jadīdah?* (or is the trend is the militarization of the state and the creation of Nasirist military nationalism?)
2.	Z	*Na'am Na'am* (yes..yes)
3.	A →	*Lā lā Bil'aks* (No no it is the opposite)
4.	Z	*Bada'a Fīhā* (It has started)
5.	S →	*Lā lā Bil'aks* (No no it is the opposite)

The Excerpt 1 presents a discussion about the militarization of the Libyan state by the influence of Nasirist nationalism. The speaker, Zaynah, fully agrees with what had been said by the host, Tawfīq, about the mentioned policy. In response to Zaynah's prior reply, the other speaker, Ṣāliḥah, disagrees fastly and directly (in line 3) by using a short negated particle (*Lā/No*) twice, followed by the common negative phrase in Arabic (*Bil'aks/It is the opposite*). Ṣāliḥah keeps maintaning her disagreement with the same oppositional statement in line 5. This type of disagreement is considered as a clear, fast and straightforward one,

without utilizing any mitigating device. Likewise, this following example displays another simple and direct disagreement among Arab speakers in their TV discussion by using another type of linguistic particles:

Excerpt 2 (*Nīrān Ṣadīqah*, Skynews Arabic, 9/2/2016, S = Ṣabāh, F = Fawwāz, A = 'Abdul Azīz).

1.	**S**	*Lākin Anā Bitaqdīrī Al-Islām Fī Turkiya 'Indamā Nadhhab Ilā Turkiyā Lan Tarāhā Illā Min Khilāl Manār Al-Jawāmi' Kullu Shay' Kullu Shay'* (But in my opinion Islam in Turkey when we go to Turkey you will only see it through the minaret of the mosques everything everything)
2.	F →	*Wa Lākin Wa Lākin Taghayyarat Turkiyā Al-ān Ustadh ṣabāh* (But Turkey has changed now Mr. Sabah)
3.	A	*Laysa Kathīrah* (Not many)

Conversation in Excerpt 2 has been discussing political issue in respect of the change of political environment and outsiders' perceptions towards Islam in Turkey. The speaker, Ṣabāh, argues that Islam in Turkey still is seen as an Islamic country that preserves the Muslim identity through the minarates of the mosques. In response to this matter, Fawwāz, the other conversant directly does not agree with his opinion by using the particle (*Lākin/But*) in order to give a statement that is contrasting with what had already been mentioned. This particle, then, followed by another extended and convincing sentence to view his own opinion (*Turkey has changed now Mr Sabah*, line 2). However, suddenly the other speaker, 'Abdul 'Azīz, fastly disagrees with what had been mentioned and uses the particle (*Laysa/Not*, line 3). Aforementioned negative particles and phrases (*La, Laysa, Lākin* and *Bil'Aks*) are commonly used in Arabic language to reject someone's view. Another type of linguistic tool might be used with the same purpose, as shown by this following example:

Excerpt 3 (*Ḥadīth Al-Sā'ah*, BBC Arabic, 10/10/2013, N = Nāṣir, A = 'Abdullah)

1.	**N**	*Law Kunnā Istamarraynā 'Alā Lā Tafāwudh Wa Lā Hiwār Qad Kānat Bada'at Al-Ḥarb Wa Qad Kānat Iḥtallat Al-Janūb* (If we had continued neither negotiation nor dialogue the war would have begun and the South would have been occupied)
2.	A →	*Hādhā Al-Kalām Ghalaṭ* (This statement is wrong)

As a substitute of using negative particles, some adjectives in certain sentences could be utilized to generate an adversarial stance towards someone's point of view. In the above excerpt, Nāṣir believes that negotiation and dialogue are the most crucial political decision to prevent the war and military occupation in Yemen. Nonetheless, 'Abdullah directly denies the prior statement by expressing a specific sentence that contains an Arabic adjective (*Ghalaṭ/Wrong*) indicating a clear negative evaluation in response to the previous opinion, without any intensification or mitigation.

Rather than

Excerpt 4 (*Nīrān Ṣadīqah*, Skynews Arabic, 9/2/2016, H = Ḥasan, F = Fawwāz)

1.	F	*Anna Al- Ḍughūt Al-Amrīkiyyah Tuaddī (0.2) Tusā'id Al-Nidhām Al- Īrānī 'Alā Imtiṣās Hādhihi Al-Ḍughūt Al-Dākhiliyyah* (American pressure helps (0.2) the Iranian regime to absorb these internal pressures)
2.	H →	*Anā Anā Akhtalif Ma'aka* (I…I disagree with you)

In Excerpt 4, both conversants Ḥasan and Fawwāz are talking about the interference of the United States of America (USA) and its power to reduce internal conflicts in Iran. Fawwāz supports the intervention of the USA in Iran, whereas Ḥasan precisely did not agree with him by using more straightforward disagreement statement. Unhesitatingly, he chooses a sentence containing the verb (*Akhtalif/Disagree*) itself, rather than depending on more simple particle to express his counterattack, such as *no, not*, *it' is the opposite*, as stated before. We found that this sort of disagreement expression is lesser than short disagreement particles, but it has diversity in term of verb's use. At times, plural forms are produced by a single person, such as: (*Naḥnu Mukhtalifīn/We disagree*) or the disagreement verb is replaced by its opposite verb preceded by a negative particle, such as (*Ma Nattafiq Shay'/We do not agree*). The overt disagreement expressions produced in this study involve lexical, phrase, sentence levels and the variety of verb's use which refers to speaker's confronting stand against another opinion.

Mitigated disagreements

Mitigated disagreements are any negative expression to a prior statement that reduces the level of direct disagreement. It could be a single particle or word or simple phrase and sentence. Several previous studies classified it under "partial disagreement". Among partial disagreement features are the use of uncertain expression such as: *"maybe", "a little", "it seems", "partially", "to some extent", "in some way", "a sort of" and "I think"*. In conversation analysis field, these expressions are considered as hedging devices that are uttered by a conversant to create liveliness and politeness as well as to facilitate discussion and emotional communication.

These linguistic devices are useful pragmatic markers to avoid direct criticism with the other speaker. In additon, this study finds equal linguistic devices and reveales a new one in selected Arabic TV data. They include: *"A'taqid" (I think), "Aftakir" (I think), "Larubbamā" (maybe), "Naw' Min" (a sort of)*, the use of particle *"Lākin/But* when disagreeing with other speakers. Some unique linguistic tools used to alleviate the level of direct disagreements in this study are disagreement accompanied by an apology, disagreement preceded by an Arabic vocative particle or speaker's deferential title, and sentences that appreciate the other's opinion. As previously mentioned, only important excerpts will be selected and examined.

Excerpt 5 (*Al-Niqāsh*, France24 Arabic, 4/10/2016, S = Ṣāliḥah, Z = Zaynah).

1.	Z	*Fī Lībiyā ‘Indamā Kānat Ṭā’irat Khalīfah Ḥaftar Taqṣuf Al-Zāwiyah Taqṣuf Zuwārah Qaṣafat Al-Makhzan Makhzan Li Al-Mawād* (In Libya when Khalifa Haftar’s plane was bombing Zawiya it bombed Zuwara, it bombed warehouse warehouse for materials)
2.	S →	*Khallīni Anā ‘Indī Ta’qīb (0.2)Lianna Niḥnā Mā Yaḥduth ‘Indanā Fī… Fī Binghāzī Mumkin Larubbamā Shay’ An Yakhtalif ‘Alaynā Fī.. Fī Al-Gharb Aw Aw Zamīlatī Tandhur Bimiqyās Ākhar* (Let me have a comment because what is happening with us in Benghazi is maybe perhaps something is different for us in the West side or my colleague looks at another angle)

In defending her view about the violence and bombings carried out by General Khalīfa Ḥaftar, Ṣāliḥah disagrees with Zaynah by using alleviated form of disagreement. In other words, the level of disagreement statement was mitigated. In response to Zaynah’s view about the mentioned issue, she did not use the disagreement verb which refers to herself, on the other hand, several particles and verb adjustment were employed. In the beginning, some pragmatic markers (*Mumkin/Maybe, Larubbamā/Perhaps, Shay’/Something*) were used to indicate a weaker and indirect disagreement. Then, the verb that indicates her disagreement was referred to the other person or view by uttering (*Shay’ An Yakhtalif ‘Alaynā/something is different from us*, as marked by the arrow). Within a short period of time, she minimizes the degree of disagreement by appreciating the other speaker’s view and says: (*Aw Zamīlatī Tandhur Bimiqyās Ākhar/or my colleague looks at another angle*). In this sentence, a phrase (*Zamīlatī/My colleague*) was produced as well and can be considered as one kind of mitigating device to save the listener’s face. One vital point to be noted here is that the expression of mitigated disagreement is usually longer and the statement used is more hesitant than that of direct disagreement.

Excerpt 6 (*Ḥadīth Al-Sā’ah*, BBC Arabic, 9/2/2018, F = Fidā, R = Rāshid, A = ‘Abdul ‘Azīz)

1.	R	*Al-Shabāb Illī Ṭāli’īn Fī* (0.2) *Al-Shawāri’ Illī Shuftahum Wa Shāfūhum Al-Nās Fī Fī Al-Waṣāiṭ Humma Al-Abnā’ Wa Banāt Al-Sha’b Al-Sūdānī* (The young people who are on the streets that I have seen and the people in the media have seen are the sons and daughters of the Sudanese people)
2.	F	*Hal Hāzdihī Al-Aḥdhāb Wazn Haqīqīy Fī Al-Shāri’ Fī Ra’yik?*(Are these parties real benchmark in your opinion?)
3.	A →	*Anā Al-Haqīqah U’īd Al-Nadhr Li Al-Ru’yah Al-Mukhtalifah Ya’nī Anā Biaftakir Anna Al-Ān Fī Al-Sūdān Lā Naḥtaj Ilā al-Iṣlāh Al-Siyāsī Faqaṭ Wa Anā Biaftakir Anna Al-Taswiyah Al-Siyāsiyyah Hiya Al-Ḥal Al-Amthal* (I am in fact reconsidering the different view I mean I think that now in Sudan we do not need only political reform and I think that a political settlement is the best solution)

Another type of pragmatic marker to indicate mitigated disagreement is used in the Excerpt 6. The speaker, Rāshid, attempts to defend his view implicitly by saying that street demonstrations done by young people are a sincere and good political solution for Sudan government. Then the host, Fidā, asked another speaker, ʻAbdul ʻAzīz, to give another opinion with respect to the prior statement. In order to lessen the degree of disagreement, it seems that ʻAbdul ʻAzīz partially agrees with what had been mentioned by Rāshid by saying that Sudanese people need political reform, which demonstrations could be part of it as he said :(*Lā Naḥtaj Ilā al-Iṣlāh Al-Siyāsī Faqaṭ/We do not need only political reform*). At the same time, ʻAbdul ʻAzīz used one important pragmatic marker (*Biaftakir/I think*), then he creates another term for political reform as one kind of evasive strategy to reduce his direct disagreement and the term is (*Al-Taswiyah Al-Siyāsiyyah/Political settlement*), rather than supporting street demonstrations. The phrase (I think) and vague statement are regarded as hedging opinions. They are frequently used in criticizing, complaining, suggesting as well as expressing disagreement, so that it do not seem to differ with the listener directly (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Excerpt 7 (*Al-Niqāsh*, France24 Arabic, 24/7/2017, N = Nūrah, A = Aḥmad).

1.	N	*Niḥnā Na'tabir Al-Damj Aw Jā'ū 'Alā Hā'ulā' Illī Ḥaṣalat Mihum Al-Intihākāt* (We consider the Damj [an army unit] or those who came from them which cause the violation to take place)
2.	A →	*Lā Lā 'Afwan Abadan Abadan Anā Lā Yumkin An Attahim Aqūl, Al-Intihākāt Aqūl Al Al-Intihākāt Al-Akhṭā' Taḥduth Min Al-Jamī'* (No no sorry never never I can't accuse I say violations mistakes happen to everyone)

Other than employing aforementiond markers to lessen the level of direct disagreement, the interlocutor might disagree with someone by using certain language structures which is followed by an apology. In the Excerpt 7, the issue discussed is related to some military units in Iraq that were responsible for the violation of human right during wartime. The interlocutor, Nūrah, blamed the Damj unit for the oppression and killing of civilians during the war. As a quick reaction to her statement which may be a groundless allegation, Aḥmad did not agree with that statement by initially stating the (*Lā/No*) particle twice, but then his refutation was followed by an Arabic apologetic word (*'Afwan/Sorry*), so that his oppositional view could be softened. He argued that mistakes during wartime might be happen to everyone. Furthermore, alleviated or mitigated disagreement can be considered as a polite way to contradict with the other interlocutor. We conclude that the disagreement expressed in the previous excerpt was not a direct one due to the presence of apologetic word and it was uttered in standard Arabic. In another case, apologetic word could be produced in colloquial Arabic, as displayed by this following excerpt:

Excerpt 8 (*Al-Niqāsh*, France24 Arabic, 4/10/2016, S = Ṣāliḥah, Z = Zaynah).

1.	S	*Lākin Hādhā Fan Al-Muṣālaḥah Yā Ukhtī* (But this is the art of reconciliation oh my sister)
2.	Z	*Lā, Lā Yūjad Muṣālaḥah* (No there is no reconciliation)
3.	S	*Wa Hādhā Wa Hādhā Fan Al-Siyāsah* (And this is and this is the art of politic)
4.	Z	*Lā Yūjad Fan Al- Muṣālaḥah Bi Hādhā Al-Shakl (The is no art of reconciliation like this)*
5.	S →	*Lā, Lā Ma'alish Akhtalif Ma'ak Fi Hādhihī Al-Nuqṭah Yā Zaynah (No, no sorry I disagree with you on this point oh Zaynah)*

Two speakers in the Excerpt 8 are defending their own stands regarding political and military solutions in Libya. Zaynah denies totally any attempt from the government to make reconciliation, whereas Ṣāliḥah tries to upheld her opinion as best she could. In this example, we found various particles and phrases that were utilized to counter the views of the other party but with more polite and lower degree of disagreement. (*Lā/No*) particles were produced by each speaker and (*Lākin/But*) was only used by Ṣāliḥah. As shown by the above arrow, mitigated disagreement is generated through the use of various linguistic devices including apologetic word in colloquial Arabic (*Ma'alish/sorry*). It was used immediately after (*Lā/No*) particle, then followed by an obvious disagreement verb (*Akhtalif/I disagree*) and finally backed by Arabic vocative particle and the name of the other interlocutor (*Yā Zaynah/Oh Zaynah*). In Arabic culture, *Ḥarf Al-Nidā'* or the vocative particle (*Yā/Oh*) and calling the name of the other speaker (or using person's title like *Dr./My brother/Ustādh)* might be used together to minimize the level of direct rejection and show deference in human interaction. This is one of the unique features found in our data.

Excerpt 9 (*Al-Niqāsh*, France24 Arabic, 24/7/2017, T = Tawfīq, N = Nūrah, A = Aḥmad).

1.	N	*Wa Al-Yawm Al-'Irāqiyyīn Jamī'an Bikulli Mukawwinātihim Bikulli Intimā'ātihim Al-Fikriyyah Wa Al-Ijtimā'iyyah Wa Al-Siyāsiyyah Wa Al-Dīniyyah Waqafū Khalfa Quwwātihim Al-Musallaḥah......Wallatī In'akasat Tafā'ulan Fi Kulli Al-Shāri' Al-'Irāqīy* (And today all Iraqis with all their components with all their intellectual social political and religious affiliations stood behind their armed forces which reflect an optimism in the Iraqi street.)
2.	T	*Al-'Irāqiyyīn Yataḥaddathūn Bi Ṣawt Wāḥid Al-Yawm?* (The Iraqis speak with one voice today?)
3.	N	*Ṭab'an Bi Al-Nisbah Lisu'ālik Anna Nadhrāt Al-Tāfa'ul 'An Muḥafadhah Nīnawā Laysat Nadhrāt Al-Tafā'ul Kamā Al-Bāqīn Yandhurūn Ilayhā Huwa Yataḥaddath 'An Ra'yihi* (of course with regard to your question the optimistic view of Ninaveh government is not an optimistic view as the rest look at it he talks about his opinion)

A further type of Arabic mitigated disagreement was found in the present data. Speakers in the Excerpt 9 are talking about the aftermath of the war in Iraq. The speaker, Aḥmad, is very positive in expressing his view by saying that optimism can be seen clearly with the unity of all Iraqis, in all components. On the contrary, the other speaker, Nūrah, opposes his view directly at the beginning by saying (*is not an optimistic view*), then she reduces her direct opposition through the use of a sentence which appreciates the other point of view. She did not use a direct disagreement verb that refers to herself such as (*I disagree*). In this case, another type of verb that refers to second person was used (*He talks about his opinion*), so that a listener's face could be saved. In our opinion, this approach can be listed as one kind of mitigated disagreements. Directing disagreement to the second person with the presence of the actual addressee is part of the manifestation of politeness. This strategy is quite equivalent – in some way - to the strategy of "displacing the hearer" which is classified under off record politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Quantitative analysis and comparison

The subsequent section presents the result of overall frequency and percentage of direct and mitigated disagreement responses. Each token of both disagreements were identified and calculated manually including all lexicals, particles, phrases and sentences related to our concern. The general statistical result showed that comparison between both disagreement responses did reach statistical significance. After calculating the occurance for a variety of responses, they were 386 or 64.9% direct disagreements used and repeated by Arabic TV conversants, while mitigated disagreement responses were 208 which equal 35.0%. Each type of disagreement is divided into its specific type of response, as shown by Table 1:

Table 1 Overall result of direct and mitigated disagreement responses

Disagreement Types	*Specific Response Types*	*Frequency*	*Percentage*
Direct Disagreement	Negation particle (e.g., No, not, did not)	362	
	Disagreement phrase (e.g., It is the opposite)	11	
	Direct disagreement verb (e.g., I disagree)	13	
		386	**64.9%**
Mitigated Disagreement	Partial disagreement (e.g., Maybe, a sort of)	58	
	Disagreement followed by an apology	28	
	Appreciation of other's opinion	6	
	Using vocative particle & address term	116	
		208	**35.0%**
	Total	594	100%

Some reasons can be assumed behind a large percentage of direct disagreement responses used in our data. The reason could be divided into two main aspects: the topic of discussion and the nature of linguistic tool in expressing disagreement. One possible explanation for the first aspect is the topic discussed by TV guests. There is no denying that topics related to international political affairs such as revolution, violation of rights and wars spark a heated debate among them. Moreover, conversation that took place at TV programs has a limited time of discussion and leaves no room for delaying opinion. Disagreement responses normally are expressed quickly and directly. Therefore, the specific topic chosen for this study did influence a degree of using direct disagreement among participants.

Another supportive reason of significant percentage of direct disagreements is related to the second aspect, that is the nature of some linguistic particles which had been used in expressing disagreement. From the researcher's interpretation, the other reason can be attributed to the external structure of some lingusitic particles. The clear example is the wide usage of negated particle (*La/No*) in the data. This particle is the most short form, fastly and frequently repeated by majority of TV guests. Additionally, the use of this particle is easier and saves time than using long sentences to express rejection to certain statements. Thus, the repetition of particle (*No*) contributed to the high proportion of direct disagreements in this study.

Concerning Arabic cultural dimension and its effect on the employment of direct and mitigated disagreements, the statistical result of this study is not in line with previous findings and stereotypes related to inter-cultural studies (Ayish, 2003; Feghali, 1997; Hall, 1981; Hofstede, 2010; Levine, 1985). Arabic culture and its style of interaction, as revealed by these studies, relies on the use of indirect or hyperbolic message and prefers ambiguous statement over simplicity and directness. In this study, especially in political TV discourse, Arab interactants tend to use direct disagreement in their talks, despite of the classification of disagreement speech act as face-threatening act. Very little rate of elusive statements found in this study.

More surprisingly, our study found a few of religious expressions that strengthen the degree of disagreement. As mentioned in the cultural background of Arab society, religious expression widely used by Arabs in various activities (Bouchara, 2016; Samarah, 2015). However, this study did not find a significant percentage of it in the context of disagreement. This does not mean that there were no religious expressions in our data at all. These expressions were often used in other situations other than in disagreement context, for instance, they were used at the beginning and end of a conversation and while introducing TV guests.

4. Conclusions

General observation about politeness orientation and conversation pattern in certain cultures should be re-evaluated. This current data showed that Arabic speakers are not constantly less direct in their political TV discourse. Our extensive analysis of selected excerpts has showed a various usage of pragmatic markers to express direct disagreements. The quantitative comparison of direct and mitigated disagreements revealed a statistical significance. The outcome of this study could be generalized if we could have enrolled more abundant samples in the same context. It is highly recommended that further studies on disagreement should examine different topics of TV discussion such as religious, social, sport and economic topics.

The findings of the study have some implications in term of theoretical and cultural aspects. Researchers in linguistic, communication and media studies especially in Arabic language should be mindful of the need to study human communication with two opposing processes: politeness and impoliteness/solidarity and conflict/agreement and disagreement (Eelen, 2001). There are comprehensive and useful groundworks to study the spoken language that ease another study to apply them, such as: "frame-based model" (Terkourafi, 2005), "relational work vs face work" (Locher and Watts, 2005; 2008), "polite vs politic behaviour" (Mills, 2011) and "rapport management" (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; 2002; 2008). For cultural aspect, the study of preference for straightforward and polite disagreement would be more representative if we can carry out cross-cultural studies on types of disagreement. We can see how far the direct and indirect disagreement is accepted in certain cultures, thence, misunderstanding in communication could be avoided. Linguistic and pragmatic competence will be upgraded among interactants in different backgrounds as well.

Investigation of another contextual factor that affects the production of utterances (e.g., gender, age, habit, stereotype, educational background, power relation between participants, and religion) should be taken into consideration for future studies. All cultures are complex and it is not always easy to draw a clear line of demarcation between direct and indirect style of communication in a particular culture or language.

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YouTube links for selected Arabic TV excerpts

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m0U3ijmIDo (Skynews Arabic, Iran political topic)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lt7X92q9cz4 (Skynews Arabic, Turkey political topic)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWxbFSa0gQI (Skynews Arabic, Libya political topic).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLBibCA-gzQ (BBC Arabic, Yemen political topic)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0e_kSiIaFA (BBC Arabic, Sudan political topic)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM73yQu75QI (France24 Arabic, Iraq political topic).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujpaTwk9Z0o (Al-Arabiyya, Arab springs political topic)